

Our recovery must be just and equitable for all

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Body

This Labour Day will be the first time in 149 years that union members will not be taking to the streets of Toronto to show our union pride. But our message of "A Just Recovery for All" will be highlighted throughout the city online and with transit ads.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to uproot our society in once unimaginable ways. The loss felt by individuals and communities continues to be immense, as is the struggle of workers and families to respond to the crisis. And now parents are worried about their children returning to school, while teachers and support staff grapple with how to create a #SafeSeptember across our education system.

We have been shocked to witness the consequences of underfunding and privatization of public services in the tragic loss of life in long-term-care homes. The pandemic has also exposed what far too many have long known, or experienced first-hand: that economic inequality and systemic racism are painful realities in our country as well as south of the border.

Yet, there is hope. Hope in the outpouring of solidarity from individual citizens, workers and communities across the globe. Hope in the heroism and determination of our front-line workers. Hope in the recognition that all workers - from teachers and personal support workers, to janitorial staff, grocery clerks and delivery couriers - are essential. And hope in an opportunity to chart a new path towards a genuinely healthier and more equitable future through a just recovery.

"A Just Recovery for All" focuses on not repeating the mistakes of the past. It's about putting peoples' well-being first and overhauling an unjust system to ensure no one is left behind. It's about reimagining a world that prioritizes worker and community safety, prohibits business models based on poverty wages, tackles systemic racism, and allows everyone to live with respect and dignity. It must lead to environmental sustainability and climate justice. In essence, it's an opportunity to take advantage of this moment of unprecedented economic stimulus to rewrite the wrongs of modern-day capitalism.

That's why our labour council has joined hundreds of organizations across Canada and the world to endorse these six principles for a just recovery:

Put people's health and well-being first, with no exceptions

Strengthen the social safety net and provide relief directly to people

Prioritize the needs of workers and communities

Build resilience to prevent future crises

Our recovery must be just and equitable for all

Build solidarity and equity across communities, generations and borders

Uphold Indigenous rights and work in partnership with Indigenous peoples

It's not an easy task. We will be fighting the Ford governments' undermining of collective bargaining rights, calling for public delivery of long-term care, and demanding regulations to govern the gig economy. We need the federal government to bring in the long-overdue national pharmacare and childcare programs, and permanently fix the employment insurance system. And our cities desperately need funding to avoid financial disaster and maintain public transit.

Our economy has been powered by skilled workers from generations of immigrants, refugees and Indigenous communities whose grit and determination built our nation. But we must recognize that we don't all start from the same place. Every day, our sisters and brothers are harmed by the indignity of structural and institutional racism. That's why it's incumbent on us to fight the politics of division that threatens the rich social fabric of Canada's largest urban centre.

Learning from each other, building a culture of understanding, reaching out to those who feel marginalized, working to eliminate discrimination and racism - these are key steps to embracing our common humanity and shared prosperity.

This year's Labour Day is not just a chance to commemorate past achievements, but a time to be bold in our commitment to a future that puts the health and well-being of people and our planet first. The choices we make today will shape our society, economy, health and climate for decades to come. Let's make sure we choose to build a more equitable and sustainable society by working together for a just recovery for all.

John Cartwright is a carpenter and the president of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council, representing 220,000 workers in every sector of the economy since 1871.

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